



Department  
for Education

# A level subject content: equality analysis

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# 1. Introduction

This document assesses the equalities impact of new subject content for AS and A levels in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, and geography. Impact is assessed by reference to the protected characteristics of pupils or students. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising functions, to have due regard to the need:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Age is not a relevant protected characteristic in relation to schools.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and looked after children are not groups covered specifically by the Equality Act (although pupils within those groups may otherwise share a protected characteristic), but have been included in this analysis wherever possible. This is because those groups can be over-represented among low attaining pupils and we are keen to ensure the difficulties they face are not unnecessarily compounded by qualification reforms. They have not been included as a proxy for groups with protected characteristics.

A separate assessment of the equalities impact of new subject content for GCSEs in art and design, computer science, dance, music and physical education and for AS and A levels in dance, music and physical education will be published in the New Year.

## 2. Engagement and involvement

A public consultation opened on 16 July 2014 and closed on 19 September 2014. This consultation covered the subjects that are included in this document, alongside proposed subject content for GCSEs in art and design, computer science, dance, music and physical education and for AS and A levels in dance, music and physical education. We received 967 responses from a range of stakeholders, including schools, equalities groups and awarding organisations. Of these, 315 respondents gave comments on the subjects covered by this equality analysis.

Giving universities a greater role in how A levels are developed was an important part of the Government's plans to reform the qualifications. Their involvement was important to ensure that A levels provide the appropriate foundation for degree-level study. Ofqual's consultation found support for much greater higher education involvement in A levels<sup>1</sup>.

Responsibility for reviewing subject content for the remaining facilitating subjects, which are to be taught from September 2016, was therefore remitted to a new independent body, the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB)<sup>2</sup>. ALCAB was established by the Russell Group; a group of 24 of the UK's leading universities. ALCAB formed panels of subject experts, mainly from higher education and subject associations, to review A levels and make recommendations for change. The ALCAB panels' reports were published on 15 July.

This impact assessment also considers the proposed subject content, based on ALCAB's recommendations, for A levels in ancient languages, modern foreign languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography.

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<sup>1</sup> On 9 November 2014 Ofqual published the response to this consultation which can be found on its website at <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-and-assessments/qualification-reform/a-level-reform/>

<sup>2</sup> It was decided that A levels in modern foreign languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography required more significant change and development time and that these subjects would be reformed for first teaching in September 2016. Following a request from the Department, the Russell Group of universities set up ALCAB to review subject content in these subjects, together with ancient and classical languages.

### **3. Description of the policy**

The government is reforming A levels to ensure that they prepare students better for higher education and employment. The new A levels will be linear qualifications that make sure students develop the skills and knowledge needed for progression to undergraduate study.

Reforms to these qualifications are already underway. At AS and A level, subject content in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published in April 2014. These new qualifications will be taught from September 2015.

A level reforms are not being introduced in isolation. Reforms across the education system will benefit all pupils and lead to improvements in teaching and learning so that pupil performance will rise to meet the new higher standard. Many policies, for example the introduction of the Pupil Premium, SEN reforms, and the expansion of the academies programme, have a particular focus on those pupils left behind currently. A summary of DfE's programmes to support teaching for pupils with SEN is set out at Annex A.

## 4. Evidence base

Our analysis of the potential impact of the proposed AS and A level content in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics and further mathematics and geography has been informed by:

- a review of relevant literature, as referenced throughout the equality impact assessment
- responses to our subject content consultation, including from organisations representing the interests of groups with a protected characteristic (Annex B). DfE asked the following questions in the consultation on the A level subjects under analysis here:
  - Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.
  - How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

## 5. Evidence review

The following summary of evidence draws on evidence in relevant literature, responses to the public consultation on the subject content, and views expressed by stakeholders in face-to-face meetings in developing subject content.

In total, 138 respondents to the public consultation answered the question about potential disproportionate impact on students with relevant protected characteristics (from 967 respondents to the overall consultation). 58 stated that it would have a negative impact on those students with one or more protected characteristics. 52 said it would have no impact. 28 respondents were not sure if it would have an impact.

In the sections which follow, we have considered those concerns which have been raised by respondents to the consultation alongside other issues which we have identified through our own consideration of the relevant issues. In all cases our consideration of the issues has been informed by our previous work with stakeholders in developing subject content and the relevant literature.



## 5.1 A level Modern Foreign Languages

### Critical analysis in English

The proposals for A levels in modern foreign languages as published for consultation included a requirement to “appreciate, analyse and respond critically in writing in English to either a film or a literary work”.

### Impact

A number of respondents to the consultation raised concerns that the addition of a requirement for extended analysis in the English language will disproportionately impact on students from whom English is an additional language, such that they will be grappling with the challenges of two foreign languages rather than just one.

One teacher who responded to the consultation wrote, “With an emphasis on English, we would effectively drive away students who do not speak English at home, whereas they may well find the study of another language a more attractive prospect - after all, they have been learning English already, so another language is logical. Assessing in English would very much be detrimental.”

Another respondent said, “The MFL curriculum will be less accessible to students with EAL because of the essay in English. It will be harder for them to manipulate 2 foreign languages at once and native English speakers will be at a clear advantage.”

We have considered these concerns in the context of evidence about how speakers of English as an additional language fare in studies of a third language. A 2010 study showed that bilingual students already have an advantage over monolingual students in language studies.<sup>3</sup> The researchers set out to examine what benefits bilingualism might have in the process of learning a third language. They found that students who know two languages have an easier time gaining command of a third language than students who are fluent in only one language.

However, the potential impact is less clear where EAL students may not yet be fluent in English. Following further consideration and discussion with Ofqual, the panel decided to recommend removing the requirement for an essay in English from their proposed new content. Instead, students at A level will be expected to know, understand and respond critically in the target language to two works studied in the language of study, one of which must be a literary work.

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<sup>3</sup> Abu-Rania and Sanitsky, 2010, Advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals in learning a third language, The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

## Conclusion

The requirement to appreciate, analyse and respond critically in writing in English to either a film or a literary work was included in the proposed A level subject content in order to increase rigour and to ensure the qualification better prepares students for the requirements of further study or employment. Evidence suggests that bilingual students are actually at an advantage when learning a third language. However, concerns remained about EAL students who are not yet fluent in English. A decision was therefore taken to modify the proposed content to mitigate these concerns and the requirement to appreciate, analyse and respond critically in writing in English to either a film or literary work has now been removed.

## Increased emphasis on literature, culture and society

The ALCAB panel recommended that more stimulating content is required for modern foreign languages A levels to re-engage students and schools. The proposed revised content requires students to engage critically with literary works and consider cultural and social concerns in the countries where the language of study is spoken.

## Impact

Two concerns raised in the consultation about the increased focus on literature, culture and society related to the potential impact on boys under legislation to ensure no group is discriminated against on grounds of gender.

One respondent from a school expressed concerns specifically related to the move towards greater emphasis on literature, culture and society, saying, “Traditionally, more of my male students have studied a language alongside economics or sciences, whilst more female students also study English literature and the Humanities. I feel the new proposal would accentuate the gender gap a lot, when we already have many more girls than boys in MFL classrooms!”

The implication is that the proposed new subject content for A level modern foreign languages is more likely to appeal to students who choose to study humanities and literature than those studying sciences. It is further implied that that the former are disproportionately likely to be girls and the latter are disproportionately likely to be boys.

Patterns of A level subject choices confirm that more girls than boys take A level English literature, humanities and modern foreign languages, while more boys than girls take sciences (particularly physics, but not biology)<sup>4</sup>. However, these figures do not provide any information about the reasons behind students’ subject choices.

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<sup>4</sup> Jin, Muriel and Sibieta, 2010, Subject and courses choices of ages 14 and 16 amongst young people in England, DfE Research Report.

A 2014 research paper by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)<sup>5</sup> found that students' motivations for choosing, or not choosing, to study a modern foreign language at A-level are wide-ranging. They include: perception of difficulty compared with other subjects; apathy towards language learning; the belief that people have a distinct aptitude for languages; perception that content is not sufficiently innovative to be motivating; not being made aware of the positive impact on earning potential or employability as a result of industry requirements for foreign language skills.

There is no evidence in the JCQ research that the decision to study a modern foreign language is in any way influenced by an overriding preference for any broad category of subjects, such as humanities. The JCQ evidence suggests that it is therefore unlikely that a shift in emphasis to increase the literary, social and cultural aspects of modern foreign language study will be a significant factor in causing reduced uptake among boys.

It is worth noting that one of the factors which is listed as relevant is the perception that the subject content of modern foreign languages is not sufficiently innovative to be motivating. The reformed content has been devised in part to address this particular issue, so rather than leading to a reduction in uptake, it may indeed help to improve uptake among both boys and girls.

A 2010 research paper commissioned by DfE and carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies<sup>6</sup> reports that in general, pupils' course and subject choices represent a series of decisions about the type of life they would like to lead in the future. The paper notes in particular the role played by information, advice and guidance. We therefore feel that any perceived lack of interest among boys can be partly addressed by good quality careers advice and guidance. This would help address the another factor noted by the JCQ in influencing uptake of modern foreign languages, namely awareness of the positive impact on earning potential or employability as a result of industry requirements for foreign language skills.

Certainly boys are at no obvious disadvantage in relation to their ability in modern foreign languages, with boys achieving more A\* grades than girls in 2014.

We have found no evidence to suggest that this change will generate any disproportionate adverse impact on any other group protected under equalities legislation. A 2009 research paper found that the uptake of language A levels in 2007 was much higher for Chinese students and "other white" students than any other ethnic group.<sup>7</sup> Chinese students, however, had the lowest uptake of A level English of all ethnic groups, whilst pupils from an "other white" background had a relatively high uptake of English. This suggests that there is not necessarily any direct relationship between a preference for languages and a preference for or against literature; at least not one which

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<sup>5</sup> JCQ, 2014, Modern Foreign Language A levels: Review of A\* Grade and Take Up, Joint Council for Qualifications.

<sup>6</sup> Jin, Muriel and Sibiet, 2010, Subject and courses choices of ages 14 and 16 amongst young people in England, DfE Research Report

<sup>7</sup> Vidal Rodeiro, 2009, Uptake of GCSE and A level subjects in England by ethnic group 2007, Cambridge Assessment.

overrides other factors influencing A level choice. The paper also showed that pupils from Caribbean, Irish and mixed White and Black Caribbean backgrounds had the highest uptake of English, whilst all being at the lower end of language uptake. This suggests that, if anything, a greater focus on literature might help increase uptake of languages among these more poorly represented groups.

As discussed in relation to gender, there are likely to be a number of factors influencing subject preferences among different ethnic groups. Proficiency in English (i.e. fluency in a second language before taking a third) may be a factor and this is discussed in more detail below.

## **Conclusion**

The existing research evidence about why students choose to study A level modern foreign languages does not suggest that the increased focus on literature, culture and society will lead to a reduction in the number of boys choosing to sit A levels in these subjects. Nor can we find any evidence to suggest there will be reduced uptake among any other group. On the contrary, the new proposals are in part designed to help make the subject more interesting and appealing to all students. The Government will continue to monitor any gender gap in uptake of modern foreign languages, but would encourage schools to make students aware of the benefits of studying modern foreign languages, particularly through the provision of high quality careers advice and guidance.

## 5.2 A level Ancient Languages

The ALCAB panel concluded that the current A level specifications in ancient and classical languages are essentially fit for purpose and are intellectually rigorous and challenging. The panel made recommendations to fine-tune the subject content and discourage memorisation of set texts in English translation. As there is currently no discrete content for ancient languages, new subject content has been developed, drawing on the existing A level specifications.

### Impact

We only received two responses to the consultation questions about impact on equalities groups which related to A level ancient languages. The comments made in both of these cases were general comments on the subject content and did not note any specific impact on any groups protected under equalities legislation or any of the other groups considered in this impact assessment.

We have found no evidence in research literature or in our engagement with other stakeholders that there is likely to be any disproportional impact on members of any groups protected under equalities legislation. Because existing specifications were considered to be essentially fit for purpose, there is little significant change to content and we would therefore expect any resultant impact to be minimal too.

### Conclusion

The lack of any comments about the impact of A level subject content for ancient languages on students with protected characteristics supports our view that there are no major concerns about the impact that the proposed content will have on students protected under equalities legislation. This is consistent with the fact that existing specifications were considered to be largely fit for purpose.

## 5.3 A level Mathematics

### Increased emphasis on problem solving

The revised subject content aims to ensure that A level mathematics students are equipped with the skills and understanding needed for progression to university or employment. The requirements now prescribe 100 per cent of the content of A level mathematics, to ensure consistency across awarding organisations. This change is a direct response to requests from higher education and subject experts. The prescription also aims to support co-teachability of A level and AS mathematics.

The revised content emphasises problem solving, interpretation and testing to strengthen students' deep understanding of mathematical concepts and of the applications of these concepts. Students will be required to interpret at least one real, large data set. This addition aims to ensure that students develop the skills in interpreting and making inferences from data needed for progression to university and employment.

### Impact

One respondent representing a national teaching union expressed a concern that the emphasis on problem solving could have a particular impact on members of minority ethnic and faith groups. The respondent said, "The setting of problems in context is always problematic, particularly when the context is completely unfamiliar to students because of cultural or economic differences."

Whilst this is a valid concern, the value of a qualification in mathematics for employment frequently depends on the application of mathematical theory to real world problems. A qualification which did not address this would not prepare students sufficiently well for future employment and would let down those industry sectors which depend on these skills. We believe it is possible for Awarding Organisations to design specifications and examinations in a way which ensures that problem solving is accessible to students of all ethnic and faith groups. Good quality teaching will also help to ensure understanding across all equalities groups.

### Conclusion

The benefits of problem solving in maths are widely acknowledged in a broad range of research.<sup>8</sup> We have considered the concern that problems must always be framed in context and this may therefore be less accessible to students unfamiliar with the context because of reasons of ethnicity or faith. We do not feel this outweighs the benefits of

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<sup>8</sup> e.g. (1) Cai, 2003, What research tells us about teaching mathematics through problem solving. In Lester, Jr. (Ed.), *Research and issues in teaching mathematics through problem solving*, Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and (2) Lambdin, 2003, Benefits of teaching through problem solving. In Lester & Charles (Eds.), *Teaching mathematics through problem solving: Prekindergarten-grade*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

including problem solving in subject content. Rather it should help inform the development of specifications and problem scenarios that are ethnically sensitive and inclusive. Awarding Organisations are required to comply with equalities legislation to minimise bias, ensure accessibility of qualification and make assessment fit for purpose. They will take all of these factors into account in developing new specifications that are inclusive of pupils with all protected characteristics.

## **Compulsory mechanics**

As outlined above, the requirements now prescribe 100 per cent of the content of A level mathematics, to ensure consistency across awarding organisations. This includes a requirement to study quantities and units in mechanics.

## **Impact**

Concerns about the inclusion of mechanics in the A level mathematics content focus solely on the impact on female students as a protected group under equalities legislation. Four respondents to the consultation recorded concerns of this nature. Two were independent respondents, one represented a school and another wrote on behalf of a teacher membership organisation. Their shared concern is that fewer girls will choose to study A level mathematics because of the inclusion of mechanics.

One respondent wrote, “Girls in general dislike mechanics - see the evidence of current take-up of mechanics modules by gender. Being forced to study mechanics in A-level mathematics will discourage girls from taking up the subject.”

Another respondent from the higher education sector said, “Our concern with context stems from the detrimental effects on performance, recruitment and motivation of a narrow view of mathematics as serving only engineering and physical sciences. We see scope for further broadening of applications of pure mathematics within examination questions, and we don’t consider that this document commits to imposing such a requirement on the exam boards. The recent ASPIRES research confirms recommendations from the US that we should recruit girls into STEM subjects by emphasising the applications of mathematics in a wider range of careers including nursing, veterinary science, architecture, sociology and psychology.”

The mechanics requirement does not constitute a large proportion of the new subject content. It is one of eighteen areas of knowledge listed in the detailed content statement. It is also one of the smaller areas with few sub-categories. We do not feel that a component of this size is likely to significantly deter girls from studying the subject. Research suggests that the subject content itself is a less important factor in subject choice than other considerations.

The ASPIRES research cited by the consultation respondent focused on science subjects, but the UPMAP study focused specifically on understanding participation rates

in post-16 mathematics and physics.<sup>9</sup> Findings from the study showed that pupils are more likely to continue with mathematics and/or physics after the age of 16 if they recognise that studying one or more of these subjects post-16 stands them in good stead in terms of achieving a well-paid and interesting job. Perceived material gain was found to be one of most important factors predicting whether students will choose to study the subject post-16.

The UPMAP project further showed that young people are more likely to take mathematics post-16 if a significant adult has, over time, conveyed to them the worth of mathematics, along with a belief that the student can do well in the subject. It further showed that mathematics teachers who convey messages about the importance of their subject for students' future careers, can be highly influential.

Together these facts suggest that any detrimental impact on girls' interest in studying A level mathematics could be mitigated by good quality careers advice and appropriate messaging from teachers.

## Conclusion

Instead of seeing the inclusion of mechanics as discriminatory, DfE sees it as a mechanism by which to help positively encourage the involvement of both girls and boys in careers requiring mechanics. If girls do not encounter mechanics in their studies, they are less likely to consider further study or employment in this area. The intention is that making it compulsory will help to increase exposure to the subject among girls and will contribute to redressing some of the gender disparity in uptake of these careers. Any adverse impact on girls' interest in the subject can be mitigated by high quality careers advice and teacher encouragement.

We have no reason to believe that the compulsory inclusion of mechanics will impact negatively on students with any other protected characteristics.

## Use of technology

The reformed subject content for A level Mathematics includes the requirement that the use of technology, in particular mathematical and statistical graphing tools and spreadsheets, must permeate the AS/A level mathematics specifications.

## Impact

One independent respondent raised a concern about the potential impact of the requirement for use of technology on more disadvantaged students. As disadvantage can be disproportionately correlated with some ethnic groups, this may generate a disproportionate impact on students from those ethnic backgrounds. The respondent

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<sup>9</sup> See the TISME paper, What influences participation in science and mathematics? A briefing paper from the Targeted Initiative on Science And Mathematics Education



said, “The Maths content says that computer programmes and software should be used throughout the course. I think that some parents cannot or will not afford the latest hardware and software for their children.”

DfE stresses that the requirement to use technology applies only to the classroom, not to the home environment. Instead of being discriminatory, the intention is to positively create an environment of equality where every A level student has access to relevant technology. If there was no requirement to include it in subject specifications, many more affluent students would continue to have access to technology at home, while less affluent students would not necessarily have the same opportunities to engage with it at school.

Pupil premium remains an additional resource to help support students who suffer any kind of adverse impact as a result of disadvantage. It can, for example, be used to purchase additional technology equipment.

We have considered whether the requirement to use technology might also impact on students with a disability. A 2012 paper by Burgstahler notes the barriers that people with a range of disabilities can face in engaging with technology, but provides a comprehensive guide to ways in which they can be overcome.<sup>10</sup> Whilst some of these options may be limited by financial resources, awarding organisations are, as previously outlined, required under equalities legislation to ensure that qualification specifications are unbiased, accessible to all and fit for purpose.

Section 96 of the 2010 Equality Act includes the duty for Awarding Organisations to make reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility for disabled pupils to the extent specified by Ofqual. Ofqual allows reasonable adjustments to qualifications in the form of an exemption for a student from up to 40% of the marks available for a qualification. In light of Ofqual's determination, the JCQ's “Adjustments for candidates with disabilities or learning difficulties” allow an exemption agreement to be reached by an awarding body, before the examination, for a candidate to miss a component or components amounting to no more than 40% of a GCSE or A level qualification.<sup>11</sup> This could potentially be applied where support to engage with technology is not available.

## Conclusion

Whilst we recognise that there is disparity created by students differing socio-economic status, and hence their access to resources at home, the requirement to use technology in the classroom is intended to help mitigate this disparity and is presented as a positive impact for disadvantaged students.

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<sup>10</sup> Burgstahler S, 2012, Working Together: People with Disabilities and Computer Technology, Washington University.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/access-arrangements-and-reasonable-adjustments-2014-2015>

We believe that sufficient support is available to help students with a range of disabilities engage with mathematical technology, but that reasonable adjustments in the form of an exemption can be applied for in exceptional cases where this is not possible.

## 5.4 A level Further Mathematics

The revised subject content aims to ensure that A level students are equipped with the skills and understanding needed for progression to university or employment. The requirements now prescribe 100 per cent of the content of A level mathematics, to ensure consistency across awarding organisations. This change is a direct response to requests from higher education and subject experts. The prescription also aims to support co-teachability of A level and AS further mathematics.

The revised content emphasises problem solving, interpretation and testing to strengthen students' deep understanding of mathematical concepts and of the applications of these concepts. Students will be required to interpret at least one real, large data set. This addition aims to ensure that students develop the skills in interpreting and making inferences from data needed for progression to university and employment.

### Impact

Only three people who responded to the consultation questions on equalities commented specifically on the impact on students studying further mathematics.

One respondent representing a school commented to state that he sees no adverse impact on students with protected characteristics: "No issues here in Mathematics or Further Mathematics."

The other two respondents both commented on the impact of the decoupling of AS from A level. This, however, is outside the scope of this impact assessment as DfE has previously consulted on, and impact assessed, this issue.

Potential issues in relation to increased demand and the challenges related to context-specific problem solving have been discussed above.

### Conclusion

No specific issues have been raised about the impact of new subject content for A level Further Mathematics on students with protected characteristics, other than what has already been covered in relation to A level Mathematics and the broader context of increased rigour across all new subject content. We therefore feel we have addressed the primary concerns in the preceding sections of this document.

## 5.5 A level Geography

### Increased emphasis on problem solving

The revised content aims to indicate a clear progression from GCSE and provide students with the skills needed for progression to undergraduate study or employment. The revised content prescribes 60 per cent core content. This will provide higher education departments with a common base of assumed A level subject knowledge. The 40 per cent non-prescribed content allows awarding organisation to create distinctive specifications and introduce new material providing greater choice for schools.

The revised content addresses the concerns of subject experts in higher education and beyond, including the imbalance between physical and human geography. Core topics emphasise understanding of human and physical processes through the study of global systems and global governance; changing places; landscape systems; and water and carbon cycling. Fieldwork and specified geographical skills will be required as part of this core learning.

### Impact

Only two respondents to the consultation answered the equalities questions with specific reference to A level Geography. One respondent, representing a higher education institute, simply stated that he could foresee no adverse impact on students with protected characteristics: “This depends on how the themes are taught, but there should be no issues in Geography.”

The second respondent, representing a sixth form college, raised a concern about the fieldwork requirements. Fieldwork is already required in A level Geography, so the inclusion of fieldwork itself does not represent a change to requirements. To this extent any impact on protected groups, such as those with a disability, will have been addressed in previous equality impact assessments. The specific change that is relevant here was noted by the respondent as the requirement for each student to have an individual research question: “There seems to be a disadvantage to large centres here – if each student is required to have an individual research question this is practically impossible for us. Currently we have 416 students within our department.”

The respondent’s concern does not relate directly to any groups protected by equalities legislation. Furthermore, it appears to derive from a misunderstanding of the proposed new requirements. Subject content for A level Geography does not specify that each individual must have a different research question. It simply specifies that the question must be defined by the student. It is feasible that different students may define the question in similar ways. The emphasis is on the student demonstrating the knowledge and skills required for defining and framing their research.

The respondent further suggested that “centres able to afford/facilitate the Field Studies Council will be at significant advantage. Large centres and those with impoverished cohorts will be unable to reap the benefits they give the students.” The question of potential disadvantage to less affluent students is one which has been covered a number of times in this impact assessment in relation to different subject areas. In this case, however, the concern raised does not relate specifically to the affluence of the students, but to that of the educational institution. This should not be a significant factor as all 16-19 education is funded using the same formula, which incorporates factors including student numbers, student retention, higher cost subjects, disadvantaged students and area costs. It is supplemented by additional funding for high needs students, bursaries and other financial support awarded to individual students. The funding specifically attached to disadvantaged students, should therefore help to mitigate any impact of the socio-economic makeup of the institution’s cohort. As mentioned in previous contexts, pupil premium can always be used to help support students suffering from financial disadvantage,

## **Conclusion**

Our review of the relevant literature and discussions with stakeholders lead us to believe that there are no changes to A level geography content which are likely to generate a disproportionate impact on pupils with protected characteristics.

The very limited response to the consultation’s equalities questions in relation to A level geography supports this view by suggesting that the reform proposals are not highly contentious and thus not likely to have any significant impact on students with protected characteristics in the eyes of those education institutions, Awarding Organisations, sector advocacy groups, bodies representing equalities groups and independent individuals who responded to the consultation. There is no evidence from the concerns raised that any specific equalities group would be disproportionately impacted by the changes.

## 6. Summary

We believe that overall the proposals for reformed subject content examined in this equality impact assessment will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity by providing respected qualifications in which pupils, employers and further and higher education providers can have full confidence.

Equalities considerations have been taken into account before, during and after the process of developing new content. In examining the evidence and opinions we have collated, we believe the final changes proposed are objectively justified because they will have the effect of improving standards. Where concerns have been identified about the potentially negative impact of content, we have responded to the concerns as set out above.

We also believe that appropriate careers guidance and support can be used to help foster engagement among students with protected characteristics with subjects they may not perceive as relevant to them. We discussed this above in relation to girls and mathematics.

DfE believes that every subject should be accessible and appealing to all students regardless of ethnicity, gender, faith, disability, sexual orientation or maternity. Rather than accede to perceived preferences among different groups, DfE strives for a climate in which no subject is, or is seen to be, better suited to students with any specific characteristics. Equality is as much about equality of aspiration as it is about equality of opportunity. Where practical impediments present obstacles to any particular group's participation or success, every effort has been made to ensure that mitigating action can be, or has been, taken.

As well as considering each subject individually, we have also given consideration to any potential cumulative impact of the changes across subjects. As we are confident that any possible adverse impacts identified in relation to individual subjects have appropriate means of mitigation, we have no reason to believe there will be any additional impact at the cumulative level.

## **Annex A: Equalities groups that we have engaged with in the process of A level reform or who have responded to a reform consultation**

- Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, the membership of which consists of:
- British Dyslexia Association (BDA)
- Dyslexia Action
- Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre
- Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (Patoss)
- Springboard for Children
- Xtraordinary people
- Driver Youth Trust
- English Federation of Disability Sport
- Board of Deputies of British Jews
- National Children's Bureau & the Council for Disabled Children
- British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD)
- National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)
- Signature
- Association of Christian Teachers
- National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools (NAJOS)



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